

SECRET SENSITIVE

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

22 AUG 1974

OSD Declassification/Release Instructions on File

The Honorable William E. Colby
Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

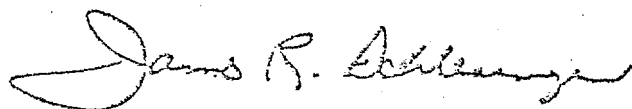
Dear Bill:

With reference to the question of declassification of the "fact of" satellite reconnaissance, I believe your memorandum lays out the pro and con arguments reasonably well. However, we continue to believe that there would be little gain, and the possibility of great loss by declassifying at this time the fact that the United States conducts satellite reconnaissance over the Soviet Union. In addition, we see no pressure for making a change at this time.

While there is obviously considerable public knowledge of the program, in our view the declassification and ultimate admission of the "fact of" would inevitably lead to erosion of the security of the program. Further, once the program is publicly admitted, the Soviet leadership could be subjected to different, largely unforeseeable, and possibly unfavorable pressures from our viewpoint. Finally, it is likely that declassification would lead to considerations of national sovereignty and U.N. discussions that could be harmful to our interests.

In view of the importance of this program to our Defense posture, we believe it unwise to subject ourselves to such added risks and public discussion. Maintaining the classification of the program provides the continuing option of a Presidential release and statement if future events make this advisable.

Sincerely,



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Attachment
USIB-D-46.2/36
BYE-090-74
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Paragraph 4 of the reference memorandum argues that this recommendation has been held up in the belief that "official public announcement of the fact...might evoke an unfavorable reaction in the USSR and might jeopardize negotiations with respect to arms control agreements." It is often overlooked--that Soviet discussion and usage of the phrase, "national technical means of verification" is always accompanied by the phrase "consistent with generally recognized principles of international law." This is treaty and agreement language as well. Therefore, the recent flurry of activity in the UN, stimulated by Earth Resource Technology Satellite (ERTS) activity in respect to permission to overfly, and the right to take photos of another nation, etc. has put us in a position where becoming blatant about our activities may call forth responses which have so far been successfully, if temporarily, held up.

There seems to be no driving reason for declassification at this time. It is an irreversible step. If what we do turns out to be wrong, we cannot go back to former positions. Under these conditions, I recommend against declassification of "the fact of".

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Fred C. Ikle

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